## **COPY OF TRANSCRIPT**

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT MIDDLE DISTRICT OF ALABAMA NORTHERN DIVISION

CYNTHIA ELLISON,

Plaintiff,

VS.

Civil Action No: 2:05CV902-MHT-DRB

AUBURN UNIVERSITY MONTGOMERY,

Defendant.



## **DEPOSITION OF**

## **COURTNEI ELLISON**

June 14, 2006 1:54 p.m.

Auburn University Human Resources Building 7430 East Drive Montgomery, Alabama

Bonnie L. Smith, RPR, CCR-B-2432

Alexander Gallo

Associates, LLC VIDEO SERVICES

TRIAL PRESENTATIONS
ATLANTA'S TECHNOLOGICAL LEADERS IN LITIGATION SUPPORT & MULTIMEDIA PRESENTATIONS

ATLANTA, GEORGIA

WASHINGTON, DC

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

Complimentary Conference Rooms Throughout Georgia And Major Cities Nationwide



NEW YORK, NEW YORK

2700 Centennial Tower 101 Marietta Street Atlanta, Georgia 30303

Telephone (404) 495-0777 Facsimile (404) 495-0766 Toll Free (877) 495-0777

2		
APPEARANCES	OF	COUNSEL

On behalf of the Plaintiff:

KAREN SAMPSON RODGERS, ATTORNEY AT LAW

McPhillips, Shinbaum & Gill, LLP

516 South Perry Street

Montgomery, Alabama 36104

(334) 262-1911

(334) 263-2321 (facsimile)

10

11

15

16

18

19

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

On behalf of the Defendant:

BURTON F. DODD, ESQUIRE 12

13 Fisher & Phillips, LLP

14 1500 Resurgens Plaza

945 East Paces Ferry Road

Atlanta, Georgia 30326

17 (404) 231-1400

(404) 240-4249 (facsimile)

bdodd@laborlawyers.com

20 21

ALSO PRESENT: Cynthia Ellison, Plaintiff

22 Debra Foster, HR Director

23

24

25

Alexander Gallo Associates, LLC COURT REPORTING OVIDEO SERVICES TRIAL PRESENTATIONS

ATLANTA, GEORGIA

Telephone (404) 495-0777 Facsimile (404) 495-0766 Toll Free (877) 495-0777

WASHINGTON, DC

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

June 14, 2006

3

Deposition of Courtnei Ellison June 14, 2006

3

4

5

6

7

1

2

MR. DODD: This is the deposition of Courtnei Ellison taken by notice and subpoena pursuant to Rules 30 and 45 of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure.

8

9

COURTNEI ELLISON, having first been duly sworn, was examined and testified as follows:

11

10

EXAMINATION

12

BY-MR.DODD:

13 14

15

16

17

18

Ms. Ellison, I'm Burton Dodd. represent Auburn University Montgomery in the lawsuit that Cynthia Ellison has filed. purpose of this deposition is to ask you some questions about your knowledge of some of the aspects of that -- claims in that lawsuit. You understand you're under oath to tell the

19

20 truth in this proceeding; right?

21

Α. Yes.

22 23

If you don't understand a question that I ask you, will you let me know?

24

Α. Uh-huh.

25

And if you let me know that, I will Q.



ATLANTA, GEORGIA

Telephone (404) 495-0777 Facsimile (404) 495-0766 Toll Free (877) 495-0777

WASHINGTON, DC

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

5 1 four years at least? 2 Α. Yes. 3 Q. Do you attend church? 4 Α. Yes. 5 What church do you attend? Q. 6 New life Church of God and Christ. Α. 7 Q. Are you involved in any community 8 activities? 9 Well, I am part of Alpha Kappa Alpha Α. 10 sorority, but not really active right now. 11 Okay. Did you go to AUM? Q. 12 Α. Yes. 13 Q. And you graduated in 2000 and +-14 Α. 2004. 15 Do you work at Colonial Bank? Q. 16 Α. Correct. 17 Q. How long have you worked there? 18 It will be a year in July. Α. 19 Have you ever given a deposition Q. 20 before? 21 Α. No. 22 Have you read the complaint that Cynthia Ellison has filed against Auburn 23 University Montgomery? 24



Α.

25

No.

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

11

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25

7

in the evenings at home after work.

- Α. Correct.
- And that's at least part of what I Q. want to ask you about.
  - Α. Okav.
- When, if you recall, did she begin 0. sharing with you any difficulties that she was having at work at AUM?
- The first time was with Allison Α. Stevens.
  - Do you recall when that was? Q.
- 12 Probably three -- three years ago. Α.
- It was like maybe around Christmas time. 13 14
  - 15 Q. 2003 perhaps?
    - Yeah, probably around that. Because Α. I was still in college then.
    - Until that time, did you have any -strike that, please. Prior to that time, had she mentioned any difficulties that she was having at work to you?
      - Α. No.
    - What did she tell you about Allison 0. Stevens?
      - That she called her a nigger. Α.



June 14, 2006

		9
F	Α.	Yes.
ç	2.	And are you convinced that Allison
Steven	ıs u <i>s</i>	sed that word based on what Cynthia
		old you?
A	A .	Yes.
		When was the next time that you can
	Cyn	nthia Ellison saying anything to you
		iculties she was having at work?
A		When she was on the search committee
for th		
Q	!• '	This was after Allison Stevens?
А	•	Yes.
Q	. (	Okay. What did she tell you?
A		She was telling me that Chris was
trying	(	Chris Mahaffy
Q.	. [	Do you know Chris Mahaffy?
Α.	. 7	Yes.
Q.		Okay.
А.		That Chris Mahaffy was trying to get
her to	be -	to vote him in as dean.
	. D	Do you recall when in was it in
2004?		
Α.	I	It had to be early part of 2004



Was that the dean search that

ATLANTA, GEORGIA

Telephone (404) 495-0777 Facsimile (404) 495-0766 Toll Free (877) 495-0777

0.

WASHINGTON, DC

ultimately resulted in Dr. Lawal becoming

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

NEW YORK, NEW YORK

2700 Centennial Tower
101 Marietta Street
Atlanta, Georgia 30303

June 14, 2006

11

since she was the only black person on the search committee that she could have some type of -- that he could manipulate her the most, coerce her the most to get a vote in for him.

- Q. And what do you think, though, the purpose of him attempting to give her an e-mail address was?
- A. So that he could find out what was going on in the search committee so that he could know the status.
- Q. Oh, he wanted -- he wanted Cynthia Ellison to send him updates about what was going on? Is that --
- A. Yeah, based on the conversation that I heard.
- Q. Okay. And Cynthia Ellison refused to take it?
  - A. She refused.

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

11

12

13

14

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25

- Q. What did she say?
- A. She said, Chris, you know that I can't do that.
  - Q. Okay. And what was his response?
  - A. He walked out mad.
  - Q. Did he say anything after that?
  - A. No, not at that -- no, he didn't.



2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

11

12

13

14

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25

13

A	. I	can't	tell	you -	I	can't	t te	ll you
that he								
on the	seard	ch comm	ittee	. I	can	tell	you	that
much.	But a	anybody	othe	r tha	an th	iat. r	10	

- Well, I mean, you mentioned Okay. that everybody new Chris Mahaffy or words to that effect.
  - Α. Uh-huh.
- Q. What did you mean by that? Are you talking about his reputation here?
  - Α. Yeah.
  - What do you know of his reputation? Q.
- Well, he is the type of person, I Α. guess, you really don't know what he's going to do, especially the last couple of years that I was on campus in school. After the first time he did not get dean, he changed.
  - 0. In what fashion?
- His mental state changed. You could tell he was a little more -- he was angry and you could just tell that he -- it was a change in him that you could just notice. He was angry with everyone.
- Did you observe any changes in Cynthia Ellison's demeanor or behavior or



-

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

11

12

13

) 14

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25

15

happened after that because I wasn't there. But I can tell you that he was just walking around with a book bag and we didn't know what was in it.

- Q. It could have been books, huh?
- A. Given Chris' mental state, we did not know what it could have been. I haven't seen him -- and I've been on the campus since I was 11 months old and I've never seen him walk around with a book bag.
- Q. And when you say that she closed the door, you're referring to her office here on campus, are you not?
  - A. Correct.
  - Q. Not at home?
- A. There was one time at home. It was the same day that she was forced to leave the campus with Dr. Lawal when they were actually talking to Chris. That same day -- well, that night, the lights just went off. I wasn't there when the lights went off, but she called me in fear. And it was me and my ex-boyfriend. She called us and we actually came back to the house because she was so afraid. I never saw my mama like that before.



- A. -- from when he gave her the e-mail or tried to?
  - Q. Yes, until the lights went out.
- A. Yes, her demeanor changed. Her health was affected as well.
  - Q. Okay. Tell me about both.
- A. You could tell that her rheumatoid started flaring up. Her leg -- she had cancer in her leg. You could tell that she was having problems with her leg. You could -- you could tell that she was afraid to go to work. And I hated to see her like that and it's nothing that I could have done to really protect her. But you could tell that she was being mistreated and nothing was being done about it.
- Q. Now, is that based on what she told you or what you know of your own personnel knowledge?
- A. I can tell you of a time -- I started working at Hyundai in 2004, right after college. But before that time, I was unemployed for August and part of September. And during that time, Dr. Lawal had just started. And one comment that he made -- they



2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

11

12

13

14

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25

19

work, did you suggest that she seek treatment for that?

- She was seeking treatment for that Α. the entire time.
  - For her rheumatoid arthritis? Q.
  - Α. Yes.
- But did you suggest that she seek Q. any particular treatment when, you know, stressors at work supposedly made it more aggravating?
- Yes. I -- on one occasion, I called Α. Dr. Paul myself. So, yes, I did do that.
- What prompted you to call the Q. physician?
- Because it was getting to where her Α. hands were so swollen to where she could barely move them and it was getting hard for her to stay on balance. You could just tell that there was a difference because of what was going on at work. And it had never been like that before.
- Now, how else did her situation at Q. work show itself at home, manifest itself?
- Her appetite changed. She was just Α. always -- you could tell even if the phone



2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

11

12

13

, 14

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25

21

June 14, 2006

like she should be.

So the litigation now is what's Q. causing her distress?

Yeah. And you can tell it. Anytime Α. that you -- I don't even talk to her about the lawsuit, but when I pick her up from -- from Ms. Rodgers', you can tell that it's affecting And I want my mama back. I mean, because she's not like this. She has not ever been like this until this happened.

How did -- how did Cynthia Ellison 0. react to the deaths of her parents and sister in 2004 and 2005 while this was going on?

It was something -- we are a Christian family. It was something that we were prepared for. And we know that we can't -- you know, that sometimes death is inevitable. So to say that that had some type of effect on what was already going on at work, I would not say that that really played a part just because in our Christian belief, we believe when somebody goes -- passes away, they go to a better place. And that was -that was her comfort. That was -- that's what held her together on that end. And I can tell



Telephone (404) 495-0777 Facsimile (404) 495-0766 Toll Free (877) 495-0777

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

11

12

13

14

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25

23

has to take her time to do things a little slower than what I can do. She can't pick up a five-pound bag of sugar like I can. So I try to help her in those areas by picking up heavy things so she won't have to do that.

- Is that in your observation the greatest limiting circumstance from arthritis, the ability to lift heavy and semi-heavy things, that she has?
- No. She has hard times walking. It's not just in her hands. It's all over her So sometimes, you know, it may be a body. flare-up in her foot or a flare-up in her shoulder or a flare-up in her hand. can't -- you know, it just depends on where the flare-up may be. But I try to always be there for her so that I can, you know, assist her in that way. So I just can't tell you that it's just in lifting because it's not. It may be walking.
- How would you compare her physical condition today with respect to the arthritis to late 2004?
- She -- I would say late 2004 to now it's been pretty consistent. She has -- the



2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

11

12

13

14

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25

25

a whole, which would include, to me, Chris Mahaffy, Dr. Lawal, Debra Foster, Dr. Nance.

- Doctor who? I'm sorry. Q.
- Nance for not responding in a timely Α. manner for something that she asked for, which was security. Because by this time from what I gather, Chris was pretty much a loose cannon. So she did not feel safe, so she was forced to leave. And I know my mom would not leave -- being here as long as she had been, I know that she would not leave the way she did if she wasn't forced to.
- Are you saying that she left because she felt unsafe and because AUM did not provide her with security from the things she feared?
- I am saying that she left, one, because she did not get the security that she had requested. Because she, by this point, was fearful on a -- forget a day-to-day basis. She was going minute-by-minute because she didn't know if Chris was going to come into the office -- what he was going to do.

Once -- what's his name? Dr. Lawal, he started turning against her. And she also



specific about that because I was not there. I was working at the time. So I can only go by what my mom told me. And she was -- by the end of the day, if she -- if she wasn't crying, she was about there or she would call me in the middle of the day. And he wasn't just, you know, mistreating her. He was also mistreating the student workers.

- Q. Did she say why she thought he was mistreating the student workers?
- A. Probably -- no, she never did say why. I can't tell you that because she never said.
- Q. Do you know when she made the decision to go ahead and retire?
- A. She didn't, I don't think, really make that decision to retire because she was forced to leave like I told you earlier. So all I know is she told me on -- it was like in February. She told me she had to leave. And she called me in the middle of the day right before she left. Right before she was forced to leave, rather. But -- so I really can't tell you because I don't know. I was at work.
  - Q. So the first you know that she was



Courtnei Ellison

June 14, 2006

	29
1	is.
2	Q. Have you made any negative remarks
3	about Debra Foster to anyone at AUM?
4	A. No. I don't know Debra Foster other
5	than she's the HR director.
6	MR. DODD: Thank you. I have
7	nothing further.
8	MS. RODGERS: No questions.
9	(Whereupon, the deposition was
10	concluded at 2:28 p.m.)
11	
12	
13	
14	
15	
16	
17	
18	
19	
20	
21	
22	
23	
24	
25	
L.	



1	Disclosure Pursuant to Article
2	8(B) of the Rules and Regulations of the
3	
4	Council of Georgia, I make the following
5	disclosure:
6	I am a Georgia Certified Court
7	Reporter, here as a representative of
8	Alexander Gallo & Associates, Inc., to report
9	the foregoing matter. Alexander Gallo &
10	Associates, Inc., is not taking this
11	deposition under any contract that is
12	prohibited by O.C.G.A. 5-14-37 (a) and (b).
13	Alexander Gallo & Associates,
14	Inc., will be charging its usual and
15	customary rates for this transcript.
16	.,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,
17	P Surgified Court A State of the Court A State of t
18	Sonne ). Smith STATE OF GEORGIA
19	BONNIE L. SMITH, RPR CCR-B-2432
20	BONNIE L. SMITH, RPR CCR-B-2432
21	
22	
23	
24	
25	



2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

11

12

13

14

15

16

17

32

CAPTION

The Deposition of COURTNEI ELLISON, taken in the matter, on the date, and at the time and place set out on the title page hereof.

It was requested that the deposition be taken by the reporter and that same be reduced to typewritten form.

It was agreed by and between counsel and the parties that the Deponent will read and sign the transcript of said deposition.

Telephone (404) 495-0777 Facsimile (404) 495-0766 Toll Free (877) 495-0777

WASHINGTON, DC

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

2700 Centennial Tower 101 Murietta Street Atlanta, Georgia 30303

NEW YORK, NEW YORK

Complimentary Conference Rooms Throughout Georgia And Major Cities Nationwide

18 19

20

21

22

23

24

25

ATLANTA, GEORGIA

Ca	ase coorting of the Document 37-23 Filed 06/16/2	June 14, 20
	34	
1	DEPOSITION ERRATA SHEET	
2	RE: Alexander Gallo & Associates, L.	L.C.
3	File No. 13898	
4	Case Caption: CYNTHIA ELLISON	
5	vs. AUBURN UNIVERSITY MONTGOMERY	
6	Deponent: COURTNEI ELLISON	
7	Deposition Date: JUNE 14, 2006	
8	To the Reporter:	
9	I have read the entire transcript of my Depos	ition taken
10	in the captioned matter or the same has been	· ·
11	I request that the following changes be enter	
12	record for the reasons indicated. I have sign	
13	the Errata Sheet and the appropriate Certifica	
14	authorize you to attach both to the original t	
15		
16	Page No. 5 Line No. 6 Change to: and ne	ods to
17	be Changed to "in"	
18	Reason for change:	
19	Page No. 18 Line No. 5 Change to: "In" nee	deta
20	he Charged to "and"	<u> </u>
21	Reason for change:	
22	Page NoLine NoChange to:	
23		
24	Reason for change:	

Alexander Gallo	Associates, LLC
COURT REPORTING	OVIDEO SERVICES
	SENTATIONS
ATLANTA'S TECHNOLOGICAL LEADERS IN LT	DIGATION SUPPORT & MILITINGTO & PROPERTY AND

atlanta, georgia

Telephone (404) 495-0777 Facsimile (404) 495-0766 Toll Free (877) 495-0777

22

23

24

.25

WASHINGTON, DC

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

Complimentary Conference Rooms Throughout Georgia And Major Cities Nationwide

NEW YORK, NEW YORK

2700 Centennial Tower 101 Marietta Street Atlanta, Georgia 30303